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# 5<sup>th</sup> ILLC International Language Learning Conference

## Tri-facet model of language learning motivation in multi-cultural context

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### ABSTRACT

Through the researcher's recent studies (2009, 2011) on foreign language learners' motivation in Australian context, the third cultural factor was detected and learners' motivation was found to be influenced by the culture of educational context where they learn a target foreign language. A questionnaire survey was conducted on university students (N = 93) learning Japanese as a foreign language to find a correlation between their motivational traits and their persistence in the study of Japanese in the Australian context. Also students learning various foreign languages at Bond university (N = 140) were investigated on their motivational changes having occurred during the course and factors affecting the changes, using questionnaires at the beginning and the end of the courses. Both studies revealed that besides the conventional account of the cultural distance between learners' own and that of target language, the distance between learners' own and the Australian educational culture where their language learning occurs also influences the learners' motivational state. That is, when learners learn a foreign language in a foreign educational context, this additional third culture plays another role to affect the learners' motivation. The study of cultural distance as a factor affecting motivation needs to consider not only how different or similar the learners' own and the target culture is, but also how similar or different the educational and the cultural philosophy between the learner's own and that of where the learning taking place.

**Key words:** *Motivation, Foreign language learning, Cultural backgrounds, Self-efficacy, Cultural distance*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of motivation in the second language acquisition (SLA) has developed towards various directions in the recent years since the extended discussions in the 90's regarding a number of issues, including the incomplete arguments on the validity of Gardner and Lambert's (1959, 1972) claims on the superiority of integrative orientation over instrumental one, and the need of more open-ended research on the second language (L2) learners' motivation. One of the recent developments in the study of motivation is the introduction of the concept of "self" in the L2 Motivational Self System by Dörnyei (2005). He re-conceptualized L2 learners' *integrativeness* that Gardner and Lambert (1972) introduced as

the driving force to narrow the gap between the learners' *real self* and future goal of *ideal self*. Also culture has attracted researchers' attention as a factor that also influences learners' motivation in a complex way (e.g. Chizwick & Miller, 2005; Schumann, 1986; Svanes, 1987; Wen, 1997). L2 learners need to go through intricate learning events and they perceive each learning event based on their previous learning experiences and L1 cultural backgrounds. This paper will take these concepts and discuss about three main factors; cultural/educational distances, learners' perceptions of events and their levels of proficiency as the representation of learning experiences, and how they work to motivate L2 learners from different educational backgrounds learning L3 as a foreign language in a particular learning context of Australian formal language courses.

## **2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

Since the turn of the century, the study of L2 learners' motivation has forged into the directions that have taken into consideration of the L2 learners' cognition of various factors that may affect their motivation for learning an L2. This research trend has reflected on the researchers' strong advocacy of the introduction of findings theorized in the cognitive psychology based on the more formal educational context (see Dörnyei, 1990, 1994a, 1994b; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997). One of the foundation studies on this direction is Dörnyei's Process Model of motivation (2000) in which the fluctuate nature of L2 motivation in its orientations and intensity was first emphasized during a long process of L2 learning. Dörnyei separated the L2 learning process into three phases; pre-learning, learning, and post-learning phases, and claimed that different motivational force plays a different role at each stage of learning respectively, and also L2 learners' various internal and external factors may influence each motivational force in either positive or negative ways. Among the three phases, the learning phase is the stage where an actual L2 learning takes place and the executive type of motivation works to help learners persist in their learning of the target language. The Process Model shed light on the motivational framework that focuses on what kind of motivational force works in what way at which stage of learning process and what internal and external elements influence each type of motivation. This approach towards the study of L2 motivation is well contrasted with the more conventional approach introduced as a pioneering work by Canadian researchers led by Robert Gardner in 60's and 70's. The Socio-educational Model by Gardner (1985) was based on the L2 learners' integrativeness towards a target language community which is primarily developed in the social milieu where the L2 learners grow up and is the basis of their motivation to learn the language of the target community in order to be integrated into the community as a member. This social-psychology based paradigm of the L2 motivation focuses on L1 culture in the milieu as the shell of the development of certain attitudes towards the target language and culture. Here the culture affects one-directionally from learners' own towards the target culture, and the society rather than individual is more emphasized as the factor affecting the L2 learners' motivation.

The study of motivation in L2 learning has long viewed culture as an important factor that affects L2 learners' perceptions, behavior, self-efficacy, actual learning performances, and as the result, their motivational predispositions. For example, in the early studies of the cultural

distance, Svanes (1987) investigated the cultural distance between different L1s and that of a target language, and how it affects the levels of achievement in the target language learning. He found that the closer the distance should be, the higher in the proficiency the learners are likely to achieve. Schumann's Acculturation Model (1986) claimed that the social distance between L1 and L2 should be the crucial factor for the development of integrative motive among learners. The smaller distance then promotes the acculturation so the learners are more successfully integrate into the target culture and develop a higher L2 proficiency. Chizwick and Miller (2005) also claimed similarly that immigrants to the US could develop a higher proficiency in English as the cultural and linguistic distance between their original L1 and L2 English is smaller. Although the valid and reliable measurement of the cultural distance was consistently under criticism for these studies, the studies showed similar results that the larger cultural distance could be a distracting factor that may prevent L2 learners from acquiring higher target language proficiency.

The original claim that Gardner made in his series of study in 60's to 70's was that L2 learners who are integratively motivated are more successful in acquiring a higher L2 proficiency compared to those who are instrumentally motivated. That is, L2 learners who are oriented with the desire to be a part of the target community have more chances to develop a higher proficiency in the language of the community than the learners who are interested in the utilitarian value of the target language, such as being ahead of others, getting promotion or passing an examination. Despite Gardner's strong insistence of the claim, a number of follow-up studies frequently produced contradicting results in 70's and 80's. Following numerous arguments, Dörnyei (2005) introduced the L2 Motivational Self System in which L2 learners are theorized to be motivated in reference to an "ideal self". L2 learners need to self-regulate themselves in a balance between promotion focus that the learners want to be and prevention focus that the learners ought to be. The promotion focus initiates learners' intrinsic motivation and prevention focus, extrinsic motivation. In this theory, Dörnyei re-conceptualized Gardner's "integrativeness" into the motivational force that narrows the gap between the real self and the ideal self. The third component of "L2 learning experiences" in the Self System is regarded to affect the learners' executive motivation related to the immediate learning environment and experience, but Dörnyei (2009, p. 29) stated the need of future research in order to elaborate it on the self-aspects of the introduced system.

In the recent studies, learning context has also been an important issue for discussing the L2 learners' motivation. Especially in the foreign language learning, learning context is the social environment which is closely related to the learners' cultural beliefs and behavior. Kozaki & Ross (2011) stated that the environmental influences can be regarded as the external factor of motivation and they impact and mediate language learners' motivational state. And especially in foreign language learning, this social environment could be synonym to learners' cultural background that most apparently manifest in their learning behavior in a classroom because majority of the learners in foreign language classroom should have mono-cultural background in general cases. Depending on which cultural background the learners have, then their preference of learning styles and attitudes towards particular L2 and its culture can be determined (Oxford, Hollaway, & Horton-Murrilo, 1992). Psaltou-Joycey

(2008) reported that cultural background is the most significant variable that affects the choice of learning strategies among learners with different cultural backgrounds. Cultural background can thus be regarded as a significant factor that may influence L2 learners attitudinal, behavioral and motivational predisposition, but some researchers would believe that more specific institutional context where an exact L2 learning takes place may override the power of cultural background and therefore, the classroom context as the social environment and cultural background should be considered separately. For example, Gan (2009) investigated Chinese mainland students and Hong Kong university students learning different discipline areas in their levels of self-directed learning, the use of strategies and the attitudes and motivation. Gan found that despite the expectation of Confusion-based Asian style learning, the students' learning styles is more specifically influenced from situation-specific factors such as language proficiency, teaching methodology and assessment practices (p. 43). Julkunen (2001) stated that "cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning situations affect motivation differently" (p. 30). That is, learners' perception of learning experience that includes various internal and external factors in each language course should be more importantly examined rather than statically categorizing learners according to their cultural backgrounds and discussing their motivational behavior only based on the cultural backgrounds.

The above argument extends the discussion of motivation to the L2 learners' perceptions of their own learning experiences, and these perceptions may be affected by learners' cultural background, learning social context. Ushioda (2001) emphasized the importance of examining L2 learners' perception of their individual learning experience that affects their short- and long-term motivation and persistence in the L2 learning. These may be interpreted that even the same experience learners may have, they perceive it differently, thus they may be motivated or demotivated based on their perceptions of the learning event, or even the same learner may perceive the same experience differently if he or she perceives it based on his/her different prior learning experiences. Taking the above discussions into consideration, the present paper will focus on three features relating to the discussion of L2 learners' motivation; learners' cultural backgrounds, L2 learning contexts and learners' perceptions. Then, based on them, it introduces a tri-faced framework of L2 motivation.

### **3. TRI-FACED MODEL OF MOTIVATION**

#### **3.1 Background of the Model**

Foreign language learning in a formal context, such as in a language course at school setting, may always have a crash between two cultures. One is the learners' own and the other is that of target language. In this setting, learners generally represent the majority of the class of mono-lingual background, for example, the class of English as a foreign language at high school in Japan. The cultural distance there has been investigated in terms of their motivational traits and L2 learning performances. Wen (1997) studied on Asian-background students learning Chinese as a foreign language at university in the US. She found a self-efficacious problem among the students because of the cultural closeness between the students' background and the target language. Due to the cultural closeness to the target

language, the students unrealistically assumed the learning of Chinese was easy for them; therefore, when they realized unexpected difficulty in learning the language, they were more likely to drop-out of the course. Matsumoto (2009) studied university students' continuation/discontinuation of their Japanese language learning. He investigated the relationship between the students' cultural backgrounds and their intentions for the continuation of learning at the university course. 19 elementary and 29 intermediate level students with Western-background and 27 elementary and 18 intermediate level students with East-Asian background were asked for their intentions for continuing/discontinuing their study to the next semester by a questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of each course. One of the major findings was that students with East-Asian background at the elementary level of the course were more likely to drop out from the course compared to the students with Western background. However, this was not found among the Asian background students at the intermediate level. Matsumoto claimed that similar to the result from the study by Wen (1997), the Asian background students had expected the study of Japanese being relatively easy for them because of their cultural (and some aspects of linguistic) similarities to Japanese. That is, if L2 learners perceive the target culture very close to their own, they may incorrectly underestimate the actual strain of the L2 learning which then demotivates the learners and terminate their learning. Given this, the cultural distance should not be regarded as a factor systematically working on every L2 learner to enhance or diminish his/her motivation. The distance could be a vague and abstract concept that each individual L2 learner subjectively perceives, and depending on their personal perceptions the distance would affect various subsets of motivation in a complex way, such as self-efficacy and attitudes towards target language and culture.

In the ordinary foreign language learning context as discussed above, two cultures, learners' L1 and L2, are involved, but there is also another unique situation in a foreign language learning context. At universities in Australia, for example, there are international students who study foreign languages, not English as L2. For instance, Matsumoto's (2009) study included Asian students from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea who learned Japanese at universities in Australia. In this case, there are three different cultures involved in the learning context for each learner; his/her own, Japanese as a target culture, and the culture of the Australian educational context. Therefore, the cultural distance has dual directions; learners' own to target language and also to the educational culture. L2 learners who perceive the target culture close to their own may view the actual learning context distant from their own educational culture. In the discussion of the L2 learners' motivation in a foreign language learning, this dual directions as the cultural distance may need to be taken into consideration because the globalization of tertiary institutions has been accelerated in the recent years and the increase of the number of international students has become more prominent in many countries.

Another point to be taken into account is learners' level of proficiency in foreign language learning. Matsumoto's study in 2009 found different motivational traits among the students from the same East-Asian backgrounds. Although the elementary level students weakened their motivation and intended to terminate their learning, the intermediate level counterparts

did not show the same motivational predispositions and intentions to drop out. This could be interpreted that the students with a higher level of proficiency were those who had more experiences in learning the language in the Australian (i.e. foreign) educational context. They were survivors of the Australian way of assessment and course requirements which should be quite different from their learning experiences in their own countries as Caiger, Davies, Leigh, Orton, & Rice (1996) noted. With more learning experiences, learners with a higher level of proficiency tend to have different motivational traits, because “motivation seems to be shaped by different temporal frames of references, with the majority ascribing their motivation predominantly to the impact of language learning experience to date” (Ushioda, 2001, p. 107).

The dual cultural distance, learners’ perceptions and their proficiency levels with varied learning experiences are regarded three major factors to consider L2 learners’ motivation and their learning performances affected by the motivation. Then, the Tri-faced Model was developed, taking three cultures into the L3 learning context. The next section will discuss its relevance particularly in the Australian educational context of foreign language acquisition.

### **3.2 Dual-distance hypothesis**

The discussion in the previous section about the cultural distance introduced that the cultural distance could be dual directional when international students learning L3 in an L2 educational context. The primary distance between the learners’ own and target language should affect either positively or negatively. The general contention based on a number of studies such as Svanes (1987), Schumann (1986), and Chizwick & Miller (2005) is that the smaller the distance may be, the acquisition of the target language should be more successful. However, Wen (1997) and Matsumoto (2009) found the smaller distance could develop the learners’ unrealistic expectations of easiness in acquiring the language. Their level of self-efficacy could be raised much higher than their actual capability in learning the language due to the general perceptions of the shared similarities between the two cultures and some linguistic aspects of the two. This primary cultural distance can be macro-factor that affects learners’ general trait-motivation. So regardless of particular individual variables, the learners with the same cultural background may be most likely to possess these tendencies when the two cultures are viewed to have a number of similar and shared aspects.

The secondary distance between the learners’ own and that of the educational context should usually affect more negatively if the distance is larger. In other words, the secondary distance affects only negatively to demotivate L2 learners when it has a large distance. This secondary distance is relevant only in the classroom context where “motivation can be seen as a continuous interaction process between the learner and the environment” (Julkenen, 2001, p. 29). Compared to students with relatively closer backgrounds of the educational culture to Australia, Matsumoto (2012) found that East-Asian students, including China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan learning various languages at Bond University showed different motivational predispositions. They had the lowest level of motivational intensity compared to Australian and New Zealander students, and students from Europe and North America. In addition, they indicated that “teachers’ personality” and “peer performances” as most strongly influencing variables on their motivation among other classroom variables, and the result was

significantly different from the learners from other Western cultural/educational backgrounds. Matsumoto (2012) claimed that “Asian students may perceive their teachers and peer learners behaving differently from those in their own educational contexts in their countries” (P. 10). He (2012) continued “due to the different style of teaching and learning in a foreign environment, Asian students may be more likely to perceive their teachers and classmates as factors strongly influencing their motivation to study in the classroom” (p. 10). The motivation affected and shaped by the classroom learning experience should be a situation-specific motivation, namely state-motivation that works as a situation-specific action tendency as Julkunen (2001) stated. Therefore, as the learners spend more in the classroom in the given courses, their motivational tendency would change and only those who successfully manage to adjust to the given teaching/learning style may be able to survive through to the next stage of language courses.

Based on the above discussion, the dual distance could be considered as being a negative factor that affects L2 learners who have similar L1 and L2 cultures as the primary distance and a very different educational culture from the learning environment as the secondary distance. The primary distance influences the learners as trait-motivation so it develops a general predisposition for them to underestimate the amount of laborious work required to learn the target language, while the secondary distance demotivates the learners as state-motivation at each learning context in the classroom. This claim, however, may be valid only in the Australian context with Asian-background learners learning foreign languages. Other learning context with learners from different cultural backgrounds may not fall into this frame because depending on the different cultural backgrounds, learners seem to attribute their failure (and success) to different aspects of language learning as Williams, Burden, & Al-Baharna (2001) suggested. This should be addressed as a research agenda in the future study.

### **3.3. Culture-based perception hypothesis**

L2 learners are exposed to various learning events continuously through the long process of L2 learning. Especially in the foreign language learning environment, those events should be unpredictably different from what the learners have experienced in their own educational environment in their own countries. Whatever the learners experience in the classroom, it should be regarded as the factor affecting their motivation for learning the language in the classroom. The learning experience then is always perceived by each learner and the perception entails resultant motivational state. The way the learner perceives the environmental factor in their experiences should abide by how the learner’s culture views the environmental factors. Matsumoto (2009) found that East-Asian background students showed weaker levels of interest in Japanese culture compared to those students with Western background. Because of the close cultural relationship between the students and the target language, the East-Asian background students seemed to have perceived the Japanese culture more familiar and less interesting compared to the Western-background students who had little overlap between their own cultures and Japanese that stimulated their cultural interest.



Matsumoto's (2012) study also found that East-Asian background students perceived classroom motivational factors significantly differently from Western background students. They perceived "teachers' personality" and "peer performances" as factors much more importantly affected their motivation compared to the Western-background counterparts. Though not statistically significant, the Asian students came to view "self-performance" less importantly affecting their motivation, compared to the Western-background students after they had experienced the study in the courses. Generally speaking, the Asian countries are more likely to regard harmonious society, while the Western societies tend to attach more value to the individualism. People in the harmonious society are likely to be homogeneous, and thus to pay more attention on what other people say, think and do. Therefore, Asian students may perceive what their teachers' attitudes towards them, how the teachers talk to them, and how their classmates interact with them through the class tasks and activities would be more importantly affecting their motivation. The cultural backgrounds of L2 learners thus seem to affect their perceptions of various variables that are included in the learning environment. Motivation can be viewed as "the on-going process of how the learner thinks about and interprets events in relevant L2-learning and L2-related experience and how such cognitions and beliefs then shape subsequent involvement in learning" (Ushioda, 2001, p. 122). How the learners perceive their own L2 learning in a particular learning environment should be one of the most important determinants of their consequent motivational state and as a result, learning performance, and their perceptions are strongly affected by their cultural backgrounds.

### **3.4 Proficiency-learning experience hypothesis**

Matsumoto (2009) found that among the same East-Asian background students showed different motivational predispositions according to their level of study at the universities in Australia. The students at the elementary level were least interested in Japanese culture among other three groups, East-Asian intermediate level students and Western-background students at the two levels. However, the elementary level students developed the cultural interest in Japanese more than other groups after they had learned Japanese. Matsumoto's (2011) study on the classroom factors affecting their motivation also found that the level of proficiency had a significant influence on the learners' perceptions of factors affecting their motivation for learning L2s. These results indicated that L2 learners' level of proficiency seems to be a factor that affects motivation. But why does the level of proficiency become a factor that influences each L2 learner's motivation? L2 acquisition is a process that takes fairly long time (e.g. months to years) before the learners reach a minimum level of proficiency that enables them to communicate in target languages. During this process, the learners' motivation continuously changes its intensity and functions due to the learners' interactions with various internal and external factors as Dörnyei (2000) claimed in his Process Model. L2 learners persist in their L2 learning because that is only the way they can acquire proficiency and gradually achieve a better and higher skills and knowledge of L2. That is, the proficiency levels are the representation of their continuing learning experiences.

At each phase of L2 learning in that long process, the learners perceive the occurring of L2 learning events in and out of the classroom, and reflecting on their previous learning

experience and their cultural/educational backgrounds, they would attribute the events to their internal or external, or stable or unstable aspects (Weiner, 1986). The higher levels of proficiency, therefore, mean that the learners have naturally more learning experiences. In the particular learning context, such that learning L3 in L2 educational background, the learners with higher levels of proficiency could be regarded that they have developed a better way to cope with the given educational context which was also foreign to them. In other words, the learners with higher proficiency in this context have narrowed the distance to the educational culture, and may be able to reduce the negative impact of the learning events on their state motivation to continue their learning. That is why the intermediate level of East-Asian students in Matsumoto's (2009) study showed higher levels of intention to continue their Japanese language study than their elementary level counterparts. The way L2 learners perceive learning events vary but are affected by their cultural/educational background. If the distance is broad, then they are more likely to be impacted from the distance negatively. However, the distance can be narrowed as they experience the learning and reduce the gap. Among learners with the same cultural background, some can do this, but others cannot. This seems to be supported by Dornyei's (2009) "ideal self" in the L2 motivational self-system. Those who have "ideal self" inside that needs to be identified as the future real self can be integratively motivated to narrow the gap and learn the L2 successfully. This ideal self could be identified not only referring to target language but also to L2 learning educational context.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper presented Tri-faced Model of Motivation that focused on three factors; dual-cultural distance, L2 learners' perceptions of learning events, and their proficiency levels as learning experiences. This model is solely based on a particular learning context of Australia where foreign learners learn their L3 as a foreign language in a formal context. The cultural distance in the conventional studies has been regarded as a factor only works as a positive factor in a linear fashion as the distance is smaller, but the present paper discussed the cultural distance works more complex way and the educational distance can be regarded equally strongly affects learners' motivational state. The distances can be narrowed or further broaden depending on the learners' perception of events, and the perception is strongly affected by their cultural background. According to a particular cultural background, learners may be more likely to perceive learning events in some predictable ways. The levels of proficiency can be regarded also a factor affecting motivation. The proficiency can be regarded as the representation of learning experiences. Thus, the more experience the learners may have in a given learning context, they could have more chances to narrow the gap between the educational distance, and may create a better chances to survive through to the higher levels of study in the given learning environment. This model has been developed only a limited study conducted in the Australian context, and definitely needs further study to verify its validity and necessary development through extended discussions.

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